

Growing a New Propagator: Illinois Responds to an Industry Need

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One of the best-kept secrets of the American economy is the explosive growth of the horticultural industry. Growth and expansion have created a great need for an educated and skilled workforce in all phases of the industry.

In August of 1996, many months of discussion culminated in an organizational meeting. A partnership between Illinois Green Industry leaders, their organization—the Illinois Nurserymen’s Association—horticultural educators, and the Illinois State Board of Education was formed.

Driven by the need to find skilled, qualified workers in an increasingly technical industry, this partnership is spearheading the way by generating interest in the horticultural industry and looking ahead to the future. This unique program draws on manufacturing apprenticeship programs as well as European models to provide students with “hands-on”, practical work experience and advanced classroom education.

The 5-year program begins in the junior year of high school. Students apply for the program through the Illinois Nurserymen’s Association (INA) with a letter of recommendation from their agriculture/horticulture teacher or school principal. Once accepted, at least five trips to participating nurseries and landscape firms are made during the year. Students observe jobs at every level and phase of the operations visited. Throughout the academic year, students must maintain a “C” average or better in their academic courses.

During the senior year of high school, approved students again follow nursery professionals and landscapers on the job. Spring semester finds candidates employed at the firm of their INA sponsor. Class credits are earned for the work experience. At the end of the year, students must re-apply for the full-time apprenticeship program. After graduation, students who have been accepted will work for their host employer during the summer months.

After enrolling in an approved college program, the student continues the relationship with the INA host and will be reimbursed for tuition expenses. During this first year students are expected to meet the academic requirements of the participating community college as well as work 1000 h at the host site during the year.

The program continues in the same vein during the 2nd and 3rd years. At each step, both the student and the host are given a list of current, industry-based skills which are expected to be learned. This list is reviewed and maintained throughout the program. At the end of 3 years, if the apprentice has successfully completed the academic requirements of the college Agriculture/Horticulture course and the job skill portion of the program, the student will graduate with an Associates Degree, receive a Journeyman’s Certificate from the INA, and be well prepared for a rewarding career in the Green Industry.

This is a program where everyone gains. Students are given the opportunity to

receive advanced education and employers win dedicated and skilled employees.

Current Illinois Participants:

Midwest Groundcovers
 The Growing Place
 Platt Hill Nursery
 Green View Companies
 Somonauk High School
 Willowbrook High School

No Excuses Accepted: Plants You Should Already Grow!!

Phill King

Greenwood Propagation, PO Box 1 90, Hebron, Illinois 60034

***Hamamelis vernalis* 'Autumn Embers'**

This selection of vernal witchhazel was made by Mr. Roy Klehm of the Beaver Creek Nursery in Poplar Grove, Illinois.

Mr. Klehm first noticed the impressive fall coloration in a large block of *H. vernalis*. He at first felt that the plant was perhaps another species or cultivar mistakenly mixed in with its more common sisters. The fall coloration is a rich red with overtones of purple, yellow, and orange. The breathtaking effect is that of a glowing campfire on a crisp fall evening. Best fall coloration is triggered with the hard frosts of colder climates and the plant is at its best there.

The flowers are colored in shades of ripe grain and are quite fragrant.

A national mailorder nursery firm has sought this plant as its "cover girl" and many have been quite surprised that Mr. Klehm did not wish to patent the plant.

Unlike the recent published reports of rootability of witchhazels this plant roots quite well in June-July.

Perhaps the best selection of witchhazel to date within the realm of fall color, 'Autumn Embers' is the equal of fothergillas in the north.

***Ilex verticillata* 'Stop Light'**

This "sister" to 'Red Sprite' appears to exhibit the growth form of its sibling.

The size of the fruits and their retention lead to the name that is quite descriptive. Fruits are often found to be 60% the size of a marble and are born in rich abundance. A traffic light in the landscape is an apt metaphor for this excellent plant. We have seen fruits retained to March if not taken by songbirds. 'Jim Dandy' works well as a male pollinator. Summer foliage is a rich green and the plant is a strong grower in youth.

Softwood cuttings root well in late June (Chicago). Growth from a rooted cutting will be 18 to 24 inches by the end of the second season.

***Acer tegmentosum* 'White Tigress'**

This exceptional small tree was selected by Charles Brotzman of Brotzman's Nursery in Madison, Ohio.